

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ACDA-12 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-13
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 EB-08 NRC-05 OES-07 SOE-02
DODE-00 DOE-15 SS-15 SP-02 CEQ-01 PM-05 H-01
PA-01 ICA-11 AID-05 INT-05 COME-00 /149 W
-----102193 201458Z /41

R 191123Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1032
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 6142

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ENRG, TECH, IN
SUBJECT: BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER THOMSON'S VIEWS ON INDIAN
NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENTS

1. BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER SIR JOHN THOMSON CALLED
ON THE AMBASSADOR ON APRIL 17 TO GO OVER THE STATE OF
PLAY ON THE NUCLEAR FRONT. THOMSON TOOK A GENERALLY
PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF PROSPECTS FOR INDIAN ACCEPTANCE
OF FULL SCOPE SAFEGUARDS. THE AMBASSADOR' FAIRLY
CANDID DISCUSSION OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS SEEMED TO
STRENGTHEN HIS APPREHENSION THAT WE -- THE US AND THE
UK -- HAD MUCH LESS TIME THAN WE HAD ANTICIPATED TO
WORK THINGS OUT WITH THE GOI.

2. THOMSON REPORTED THAT HE HAD RECENTLY HAD DIS-
CUSSIONS WITH THREE KEY PLAYERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF INDIAN NUCLEAR STRATEGY -- PRINCIPAL SECRETARY
TO THE PM V. SHANKAR; INDIAN AEC CHAIRMAN HOMI SETHNA;
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AND FOREIGN SECRETARY JAGAT MEHTA. THOMSEN SAID HE WAS
ENCOURAGED BY HIS TALK WITH SHANKAR. SHANKAR HAD RE-
ITERATED MORARJI'S CONDITIONS FOR GOI ACCEPATNCE OF
FULL SCOPE SAFEGUARDS AS THESE HAD BEEN PRESENTED TO
PM CALLAGHAN, THOUGH HE HAD MADE FOUR POINTS OUT OF
THEM RATHER THAN THREE. THE HIGH COMMISSONER HAD
CONCLUDED FROM THIS THAT MORARJI WAS HOLDING FIRM AND

THAT SHANKAR, WHO IN THE PAST HAD IN HIS VIEW TAKEN A HARDER LINE THAT MORARJI AND HAD THOUGHT THE PM TOO ACCOMMODATING, WAS BEING HELD BACK. HE REPORTED THAT SHANKAR WAS "NOT COMPLIMENTARY" ABOUT THE WAY THE USG DOES BUSINESS ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION ISSUE, BUT HAD NOT BEEN BITTER BOUT IT.

3. THOMSON SAID THAT SETHNA HAD BEEN HIS USUAL CYNICAL AND EBULLIENT SELF. SETHNA ARGUED, IN THOMSON'S WORDS, THAT THE AMERICANS WERE BEING "UNNECESARILY HORRID." HE HAD FORECAST TO THOMSON THAT THERE WERE MOST UNLIKELY TO BE ANY FURTHER ENRICHED URANIUM SHIPMENTS FOR TARAPUR FROM THE US, NOT EVEN THE 7.6 TONNES NOW PENDING. HE WAS CONFIDENT, NONETHELESS, THAT THE INDIANS WOULD MANAGE. TARAPUR COULD FUNCTION AT FULL POWER FOR A YEAR. AFTER THAT THE INDIANS WOULD BE OBLIGED TO SHUT IT DOWN FOR TWO YEARS WHILE SOME SORT OF INDIGENOUS ALTERNATIVE WAS BEING WORKED OUT. THE INDIANS WOULD THEN BE ABLE TO START IT UP AGAIN. SETHNA DID NOT TELL THOMSON WHAT HE HAD IN MIND, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE WAS LOOKING TO DOMESTIC RESOURCES, NOT FOR A SUBSTITUTE SOURCE OF ENRICHED URANIUM.

4. THE END OF DELIVERIES WOULD, HOWEVER, HAVE A BAD EFFECT, IN SETHNA'S VIEW, ON THE WAY INDIANS LOOK AT THE USG. IT WOULD MEAN THAT THE US HAD BROKEN THE AGREE-CONFIDENTIAL

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MENT, AND THAT INDIA WOULD BE FREE TODO WHAT IT LIKED. HE FURTHER DOUBTED THE PM'S ABILITY TO BRING HIS CABINET WITH HIM ON THE CONDITIONS FOR FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS. HIS VIEW SEEMED TO BE THAT DESAI HAD SAID "ALL THESE SILLY THINGS", BUT AT BEST HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO BRING ONLY THREE OF HIS LEAST INFLUENTIAL CABINET COLLEAGUES WITH HIM.

5. THOMSON SAID HE AND SETHNA HAD YET ANOTHER ROUND OF THEIR OLD DISCUSSION ABOUT WHETHER SAFEGUARDS WERE AN IMPEDIMENT TO RESEARCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEACEFUL NUCLEAR PROGRAMS. THOMSON SAID THERE WAS NO DOUBT IN HIS MIND THAT SETHNA DOES NOT REPEAT NOT THINK THAT SAFEGUARDS WOULD GET IN THE WAY. SETHNA REJECTED THOMSON'S ALLEGATION THAT HE HAS POLITICAL OBJECTIONS TO SAFEGUARDS. HE ADMITTED HE HAD PSYCHOLOGICAL OBJECTIONS. "I JUST DON'T LIKE IT," THOMSON QUOTE HIM AS COMPLAINING.

6. THOMSON SAID THAT HE HADN'T FOUND THIS TOO DISCOURAGING. SETHNA HAD SAID THAT TARAPUR WOULD GO ON FOR A YEAR. HE ALSO HAD BEEN INTELLECTUALLY HONEST

ENOUGH NOT TO CLAIM THAT SAFEGUARDS WOULD HURT HIS PROGRAM. HE HAD BEEN Milder ON THE QUESTION OF DISCRIMINATION THAN ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS. THOMSON SAID HE GOT THE FEELING THAT IF DESAI REALLY PUT HIS FOOT DOWN, SETHNA WOULD COOPERATE, ALBET GRUMBLING A GOOD DEAL.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 6142

7 THOMSON SAID HE HAD FOUND HIS DISCUSSION WITH MEHTA THE MOST DISQUIETING, WHICH WAS SURPRISING, GIVEN THAT MEHTA WAS THE LEAST EXCITABLE OF THE THREE. MEHTA HAD REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S SUGGESTION THAT THE US AND INDIA WERE ON COLLISION COURSE. THOMSON HAD POINTED OUT TO HIM THAT ALTHOUGH INDIA'S QUARREL MIGHT PUBLICLY BE WITH THE US, IT WAS A QUARREL BY EXTENSION WITH THE USSR AND THE OTHER PRINCIPAL DEVELOPED COUNTRIES SINCE THEY ALL SHARED THE US POSITION ON PROLIFERATION. MEHTA, HOWEVER, HAD REFUSED TO ACCEPT ANY IMPLICATIONS OF THIS KIND AND HAD ARGUED THAT THE SITUATION WAS MANAGEABLE. THE HIGH COMMISSIONER HAD SAID THAT HE HOPED THAT MEHTA WAS RIGHT, BUT HE WAS NOT CONFIDENT. IT WAS HIS SUSPICION THAT MEHTA NOW THOUGHT THAT, AS THE AMERICANS WOULD HAVE TO COME TO SOME ARRANGEMENT WITH THE EUROPEANS AND THE JAPANESE OVER REPROCESSING, THEY WOULD BE UNABLE TO BE HARSH ON INDIA. IT SEEMED LIKELY THAT MEHTA WAS RE-

ASSURING HIMSELF WITH THE THOUGHT THAT THE INDIAN
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PROBLEM WOULD BE SUBMERGED IN THE WORLD PROBLEM.
HE HAD ACKNOWLEDGED THAT TARAPUR WAS AWKWARD; BUT
HE SEEMED TO EXPECT THAT THE AMERICANS WOULD COMPENSATE
THE INDIANS FOR THE LOST POWER IF THIS HAPPENED, AND
THAT IT WOULD HAVE A VERY LIMITED IMPACT ON INDO-US
RELATIONS. MEHTA'S LINE OF REASONING SEEMED TO BE
THAT THE US WOULD HAVE TO MAKE AN ACCOMMODATION.
THE HIGH COMMISSIONER HAD SAID HE DOUBTED THIS. THE
LEGISLATION WAS QUITE EXPLICIT THAT THE US COULD NOT
COOPERATE WITH COUNTRIES THAT HAD NOT ACCEPTED FULL
SCOPE SAFEGUARDS.

8. THOMSON SAID THAT HE HAD TOLD MEHTA THAT HE WAS
WORRIED BY THE PRESENT SITUATION. IT HAD BEEN HIS
HOPE THAT FUEL SUPPLIES FOR TARAPUR WOULD CONTINUE; AND
THAT THERE WOULD BE A CTB, SALT II, AND A COMMITMENT TO
A SALT III. INDIA WOULD THEN BE ABLE TO ACCEPT SAFE-
GUARDS. METHA, HOWEVER, HAD SIMPLY SAID THAT THERE
WAS NO QUESTION OF INDIAN ACCEPTANCE OF SAFEGUARDS BE-
CAUSE MATTERS WOULD NOT GO THAT FAR.

9. THOMSON SAID IT WAS MOST IMPORTANT THAT THERE
SHOULD NOT BE ANY BACK-SLIDING DURING MORARJI'S VISITS
TO LONDON AND WASHINGTON. HE DID NOT DESPAIR THAT
MORARJI'S THREE CONDITIONS COULD BE MET BUT IT WOULD
BE MOST IMPORTANT TO HELP HIM PRESENTATIONALLY SO
THAT HE COULD GAIN ACCEPTANCE OF SAFEGUARDS. IT WOULD
HELP GREATLY IF INDIA COULD BE ASSOCIATED CLOSELY WITH
A CTB. HE HAD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT MUCH OF
THE PROBLEM IN INDIA WAS PSYCHOLOGICAL. WHENEVER
HE ASKED WHETHER THE INDIANS WERE IN FAVOR OF PREVENTING
PROLIFERATION THEY ALWAYS SAID THEY WERE; WHEREUPON HE
ASKED THEM WHAT THEY INTENDED TO DO ABOUT IT IF THEY
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REJECTED SAFEGUARDS. THIS WAS A POINT WORTH MAKING
AND ONE THAT HAD SOME EFFECT. HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO
DOUBT THAT THERE WAS A STRONG CAMPAGIN BEING WAGED AGAINST
SAFEGUARDS; THE INDIAN PUBLIC WAS SUBJECTED TO DELIBERATE
MISINFORMATION. THE AMBASSADOR AGREED AND SAID THAT
THIS MISINFORMATION WAS CAREFULLY PLACED. THERE WERE, FOR
EXAMPLE, FREQUENT ARTICLES, PARTICULARLY IN "THE TIMES OF
INDIA", WHICH TOOK A VERY HAWKISH LINE, ACCUSING THE US OF

OPPOSING INDIA'S FAST BREEDER PROGRAM. THIS WAS QUITE UNTRUE.

10. THOMSON SAID THE IMPORTANT THING NOW WAS TO AGREE ON WHAT SHOULD BE SAID TO MORARJI WHEN HE WENT TO LONDON AND WASHINGTON IN JUNE. THE BEST THING WOULD BE TO PROVIDE GOOD NEWS, IF POSSIBLE, ON CTB AND SALT II SO THAT WE COULD SHOW THAT WE WERE TRYING TO KEEP OUR SIDE OF THE BARGAIN. THE AMBASSADOR AGREED AND SAID THERE WAS NO HOPE OF INDIA TAKING ANY FAVORABLE STEPS UNTIL WE WOULD PROVIDE GOOD NEWS ON THESE QUESTIONS. THOMSON CONCLUDED BY REITERATING THAT A MAJOR WORRY NOW WAS THE TIME FACTOR.
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